



## Meditation and Non-Meditation

*A Transcribed Teaching Given by Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche in January, 2004*

Tonight we will talk about calm abiding meditation, or *shamatha* [Skt]. The title of the lecture series is "Meditation and Non-meditation," and it seems that these two are contradictory to each other. But if we really understand what meditation is we will see that they are the same.

The Tibetan word for calm abiding or *shamatha* is *shi-ne*. The first syllable is *shi*, which means to pacify. What does "to pacify" mean? We have no control over our usual mind, the mind in which we experience suffering and the mind that behaves like a crazy monkey. *Shi* refers to pacifying our mind - we gain control of it and pacify these undesirable qualities like wildness.

The second syllable, *ne*, means to abide or to rest. This means that we can harness our mind toward whatever purpose we desire. If we want our mind to stay, our mind stays; and when we want our mind to do something, it does something. We have complete control over our mind. That is what is referred to by *ne*.

We are talking about gaining control or freedom over our mind. We could ask the question, isn't it usually the case that we do have control or freedom over our mind? No, there is no such control or freedom. Even though we don't wish to become angry, we become angry. Even if we think that getting angry is not good, anger arises. In the same way we do not want to become sad or depressed, we do not want to be tense in our mind, but all of this happens anyway.

In particular, our mind creates a lot of problems where there are none.

### **Monkey Mind**

If we brought a crazy monkey in here and let it roam about, it would do two types of things: it would create tasks for us where there were no tasks to begin with, and it would create problems where there were no problems. The monkey would create messes where there were no messes. It would come and tear down the artwork from the shrine and mess up all the offerings. It would pull down all the ornamentation, and mess up all the cushions, scattering them all over the place.

But the monkey doesn't need to do any of that. It would be fine for the monkey to come in and sit on a really comfortable cushion and just relax there. If the monkey got a little bit thirsty, it could maybe go up to the shrine and drink some water; there's plenty of it there. Aside from that the monkey really doesn't need to do anything.

This is similar to what our mind does. Our mind becomes upset over very small issues; it takes a small issue and turns it into a very big issue and we become more and more tense about it. Why does this happen? It happens to us because we bind ourselves up with our own fixation, and because we do not know how to relax. During my talks on loving-kindness and compassion, this principle of how we make minor issues into major ones was illustrated by the example of the placement of the cup.

When we are working, we become fixated over the small problems in our job, and that occupies all of our attention so that we completely miss the big problems. When we are studying, if our mind is tightly fixated we will not be able to learn very well because there will not be any space in our minds for new information to come in. When we drive a car, we are always thinking about who is in front of us and how we can get in front of them, and how the time is running out. [Rinpoche acts out being very anxious and in a hurry.] If we drive like that it is very easy for us to get into accidents; we will turn our cars where we should not turn them and it will take us a longer time to get where we want to go. In this way we behave like a crazy monkey.

To give another example, we could take how we view our own faces. Many people have a lot of fixation and become very tense about their own face. [Rinpoche acts out again.] "I need a nice face." We look with this tight and fixated mind into the mirror. Even if there is nothing at all wrong with your face, if you look at it with this attitude for long enough, eventually you would find something wrong with it. You would find that you have a slightly crooked nose, or that one cheek is bigger than the other, or something like that. And you get more upset about it, and more fixated about that "problem." In terms of your own perception, that "fault" would become bigger and bigger and bigger. After about a month of doing that, you would look at yourself in the mirror and think, "My nose is extremely crooked," even though it isn't crooked at all. You would become very embarrassed with yourself, and you wouldn't want to go out where people would see you. You might even want to stop talking and communicating with people because you would think everyone was looking at your crooked nose, even though they weren't looking at it at all.

Even though none of these things were true, from the perspective of our own perception we would see ourselves as unattractive, and in that way our mind would have made a problem where there was no problem at all. We should understand that that is what is happening here. If we understand that, this is what's known as precise knowledge, or *prajna* [Skt.].

There are a lot of things our mind does to us in the same way and there is no good reason for them other than being a creation of our mind. But we always believe our mind and think that our mind is one-hundred-percent true.

Perceptions are created by the mind, the mind believes those projections so it becomes like a circle. That is the way it is, mind ends up believing in its own perceptions.

## **Pliable Mind**

When we meditate on calm abiding, or shamatha, we make our mind more pliable, and thereby gain control of it. We bring strength to our mind, just like exercising. If we exercise and eat vitamins at the same time, that will bring forth the natural strength that is in our body. If we bring forth the strength that is naturally present in our body, the illnesses that we may currently be suffering will be removed and our good health will help us prevent future illnesses from arising.

This approach of exercising and taking vitamins in this way is much better than taking medicine for illnesses that we have, because, for example, if we take medicine for an illness connected to our lungs, that might harm our liver and our kidney. If we take medicine to work on our kidneys, that might harm other parts of our body - the medicine does not bring forth the natural strength and potency that is available in our body in the first place. This is why we practice shamatha, calm abiding: to bring forth the potency and strength that is in the mind in the first place.

Further, when we practice this meditation we awaken what is called "inner peace," an inner peace that does not depend upon outer causes and conditions. If we try to depend upon outer causes for peace, this is similar to taking medicine for the fast relief of an illness.

If we are particularly stricken by a cup, and fixate on that, that might make us feel good in the short term. But if that cup breaks, it causes a lot of suffering for us. If we play video games or other such entertainment, then temporarily it is very pleasant. But if we have strong fixation towards it, it causes us suffering when it gets broken, and getting broken is the nature of such machines because they are compounded phenomena.

These are some general ideas about why it is important to practice meditation, shamatha.

It is very important for us to understand these general ideas before we learn the actual practice.

For instance, if we are shooting a gun, we need to know what and where the target is. Otherwise we will not know where the bullet is going to hit. In terms of the practice of shamatha, there are two essential points: the key points of body and the key points of mind.

### **Mind and Body**

In the early stages of the path of meditation, when we haven't achieved a high level of realization, our body and mind relate to each other in the manner of support and supported. Our body functions as the support for our mind, which in turn is supported by our body.

If we compare this view to what modern scientists are saying these days, it is very similar.

In Buddhism we talk about three different qualities that make up the more subtle aspects of the physical body, which relate to our meditation. They are called channels, winds and essences.

Modern science talks about neurons, brain waves and cells. The neurons are parallel to the channels, the brain waves are parallel to the winds, and the cells are parallel to the essences.

In addition, what modern science says about what happens in the whole body is similar to the Buddhist presentation. The body is like this cup, and the mind is like the water inside it. Until we attain liberation, for as long as we move the cup, the water will be moving inside. If we drink the water, we will drink our mind [laughter].

In this state, the body and mind go along together, in very similar continua. Our body goes from the stages of the body of the present life to the body of the intermediary state, between death and the birth of our next life, and then it becomes the body of our next life. Our mind goes right along that same continuum as well. This is the presentation according to the Buddhist teachings.

### **Seven Points of Posture**

When we meditate there are seven key points to our body posture that are very important. The first point is to cross the legs - just how basically all of you are sitting right now. This is very good posture. If you are able to assume what is called the vajra posture, more commonly known as the lotus posture, this is the number one way to sit with your legs. However, we should pay heed to what our body is telling us; if it hurts us a lot to sit in that posture and if we try to force ourselves into it, even though we don't want to sit that way, then that really can hurt us a lot. So we should not do it. Even if we are sitting in a regular cross-legged fashion, if our legs get sore it is no problem to extend them. Also we can sit in a chair.

The second key point of posture is to put our hands in the posture of equipoise, with our left hand underneath and our right resting on top of it, or with our right hand underneath and our left hand resting on top of it. The most important point is to rest them in a relaxed way. We can also rest our hands on top of our two knees. Some people have short arms and it is not comfortable for them to rest their hands on their knees, so they can rest them further up their thighs.

The third key point of posture is to relax our shoulders appropriately. There should be some space between our torso and our upper arms. If we relax our shoulders evenly and have our hands on top of our knees, there will naturally be a space between our upper arms and our torso. If we have the posture where our hands are in front of our navel, we can extend our upper arms slightly so that there is slightly more space between them and the torso. These are like the wings of a vulture.

One time while I was traveling in France walking through a park, I came across a person sitting down in the park. He was thrusting his arms out every few seconds. This person looked up and saw me, spoke to me and asked if I were one of those Buddhist monks who meditates. I said yes. The person asked me if I was having any difficulty with meditation, and I said no, no problem really. This person responded, "Well, when I meditate, it's kind of hard for me,

because you have to do this with your arms, right?" I said, "No, I've never heard of that technique, where did you learn it?" The person said he had read it from a book. So I asked him what it said in the book, and the person told me it had said that your arms should be like the wings of a vulture [laughter]. Maybe it's because Tibetan vultures are different from French vultures [laughter]? Just joking.

The fourth key point is the most important point of all: sitting with a straight back. We should not slouch over like this. If we try to over-extend our back, then we will fall backwards. So we should sit with our back straight. It is no problem if we end up leaning back or forward a little bit, and we should keep our mind relaxed and not be too fixated about it. We do not need to get caught up in the more subtle points of whether we should be sticking our chest out or in or anything like that.

The fifth key point is to bring the jaw inwards slightly taking the general weight of our head onto our jaw, letting our jaw absorb the weight of the head. We let the weight of our head rest so that our jaw is slightly pressing down against our Adam's apple. If we wanted to turn our head from side to side it would be completely ready to do that. Some people have a tendency to lean back with their head, or forward, or side-to-side or what have you, but we should have our head in a central place.

The sixth key point of posture is that our mouth should be relaxed in a way that our upper and lower teeth are not touching each other, and our upper and lower lips are not touching each other - there is a slight space in between. We can be breathing through our mouth, breathing through our nose or breathing through both.

The seventh key point is to rest our eyes in the way that they naturally are. We can have our gaze going slightly downward, it can be going directly outward or it could be slightly upwards. It is actually better to shift our gaze from time to time. If we try to keep our gaze in the same place for a long time, it tires us out, so if we shift our gaze occasionally, that keeps things fresh. It is okay to blink when we meditate.

### **Non-meditation**

This completes the body posture. From among all these key points it is important to keep in mind that relaxation in our body is very important. We should sit with the muscles in our body relaxed. Let's try this together, just practicing the body posture. We don't need to meditate.

Sit up straight, with your body relaxed in general, and relax your mind as well. You do not need to think of anything in particular - we're just sitting with our body relaxed and our mind relaxed. We're not talking about meditation yet. We are just going to sit with our body and mind relaxed, just like we had finished a long job that made us tired. [Rinpoche leads the participants through this practice.]

When we have finished an intense workout or exercise, and we have worked really hard, we are tired, and are completely relaxed in our body. Let's just sit together like that. [All sit.] That's all. How was that? Were you able to relax? Good.

This relaxation is meditation. But I did not instruct you to meditate. But it is said, non-meditation is the supreme meditation. Therefore we don't need to meditate. We relax our body and we relax our mind.

We experience these states of relaxation in our body and mind frequently in our everyday life. Why doesn't that benefit us when that happens? Because we do not recognize that it is happening. Just now we relaxed while knowing we were relaxing. This is what is known as mindfulness. Therefore, if we relax, mindfulness comes right along with it. Usually, we tire ourselves out and then relax after that, but we do not realize that we are relaxing - our attention is always facing outward, looking at other things.

Here we are relaxing in our body and mind while being aware that that is what we are doing. By being aware that we are relaxing when we are relaxing, we come to gain control over our mind. So that's easy, right? It is very easy. You do not need to do anything. You do not need to meditate. You do not need to create anything. You do not need to work hard. Therefore it is easier than sleeping! When we want to sleep, we need to make our bed and make sure there's a nice pillow and then finally we lay down and relax.

When we relax in this way what is our mind like? Our mind is relaxed and comfortable but still we cannot identify it; we can't point at our mind and say "this is my relaxed mind" or "this is my comfortable mind." This meditation technique that has just been described is called shamatha or calm abiding meditation without object.

Beginners probably would not experience that type of meditation for more than two, three or five seconds, but that's fine. We should practice in short segments many times. If we set out a very large container and put it in a place where it could catch drops of water, these single drops of water will cause the whole container to become full. In the same way, if we practice in short segments many times, our meditation will improve. We shouldn't think thoughts like "I need to sit for a long time," "I need to stop my thoughts," because thoughts will happen and we cannot stop them. We can't shoot our thoughts, we can't burn our thoughts, and even if we set off a bomb, that will not stop our thoughts. That is the nature of mind. We do not need to stop our thoughts. What do we need? We need mindfulness. The main point about shamatha meditation is mindfulness, or, in other words, awareness.

That's why we can say that when there is mindfulness, there is shamatha, there is meditation; but when there is no mindfulness there is no meditation. We are not saying that when there are thoughts there is no meditation, and when there are no thoughts that is meditation; it's not about that at all. The point is whether there is mindfulness or not.

So meditation in this way is extremely easy, but there is one difficulty: it is so easy that it is hard. It's hard because we don't trust it. We are always thinking that meditation must be referring to something very special. [Rinpoche demonstrates in an amusing "blessed out" kind of way] Relaaaxed! Peeeace! Opennesss! Niiice! This is not meditation.

Our expectations about meditation bind our minds. This way of meditating is so close to us that we do not see it. It is just like the design on this cup I'm holding. If we put the design right in front of our eyes we won't be able to see the details. Meditation is like that. Therefore, for beginners, it is a little bit easier to do a meditation that is a little bit difficult.

## **Meditation**

Now I will give you a difficult method of meditation [laughter]. This one relates to the collection of consciousnesses that we have. Buddhism teaches about six different consciousness: the eye consciousness that sees form, the ear consciousness that hears sounds, the nose consciousness that smells, the tongue that perceives tastes, our body consciousness that perceives tactile objects, and our mental consciousness that perceives thoughts. The reason why all of our disturbing states of mind, our suffering and monkey-like behavior, happen is because of this very collection of consciousnesses that has six different parts.

We can see how, from the mere perception of a form, we have attachment, we feel anger, jealousy, fear, and all kinds of different disturbing emotions. To give a little example: If we said to someone else, "He-hey!" and that person said, "He-hey!" right back to us then we'd be happy about that. But if we said, "He-hey!" and the person just looked at us and frowned, that would make us sad and upset, and become a difficult experience for us.

This is what happens in relation to forms, and it is the same with sound. If someone says, "You're good!" that makes us happy; if someone says to us, "You're bad" then that upsets us. The same is for tastes: when we taste delicious foods, that makes us have a pleasant feeling in our minds; and when we taste food that is not delicious, it makes us upset in our minds.

What would happen if we eat hot chili? Are hot chilis tasty or not tasty? [Various lively responses from the assembly; Rinpoche laughs.] How many people think they're tasty, raise your hand. Ah, me too! How many people think they're not so tasty? Hot chilis themselves cannot say anything about their being tasty or not tasty; they have to depend on the people tasting them. It is actually the exact same way for all things in the world - good and bad are created by our own mind.

If tasty or not tasty were qualities that existed within the hot chili itself, then it would be tasted in exactly the same way by everyone. So if the hot chili actually existed as "tasty," then it would have to be perceived as tasty by everyone who ate it. But because those qualities do not exist in the chili itself, then for some people hot chilis are tasty, for others they are not. It is the same for smells, tangible objects, and so on.

When some people who are immersed in meditation consider the thoughts that arise from seeing forms, hearing sounds, smelling smells, and so forth, they think that these thoughts harm their meditation, are enemies to their meditation. But for those who really understand the essential point of meditation, all of those thoughts can become supports and aids to our meditation. Let's look at the way in which we can make these thoughts supports for our meditation.

### **Meditation with Form**

First, with regard to form, our eyes see two kinds of things: shapes and colors. So it would be best for us to start off with a small object. We can look at a very small object and at the same time that our eyes are looking at that object, our mind should also look. If our mind can look at that object, this is what is called shamatha with object. We do not need anything but for our eyes to be looking at the object one-hundred-percent. It is not necessary to try for two-hundred-percent. [Rinpoche holds up his hand.] You see my hand. Even if we were to look at it for one whole hour, would our mind be looking at the hand for the whole hour? If our mind can see the hand, then this seeing is shamatha. That's easy, right? We do not need to meditate on our hand. We don't need to visualize our hand in our mind, or worry what a hand is like. We need merely to see it. [Rinpoche demonstrates by moving his hand around and saying "hand" in each location.]

Meditation for beginners is just like a frog - it jumps to one state then goes to the side again, then back and off to the other side, then back and off in another direction. We focus our mind on a particular object and it actually focuses on that object but then scatters off to something else, comes back to the focus, scatters off to something else. We do not need to hold our mind tightly or put a whole lot of energy into our mind to try and bring it into focus. We merely need to see.

We manage to look at the object with our mind for a few moments and then it goes off for a tour somewhere in Halifax. We bring it back, and the mind sees the object again for a while, and then it might go home for a few minutes, and then we bring it back to see the object again and that is how we meditate as beginners. We simply just keep bringing it back to that object of focus many times. It is just like exercising.

If we practice in this way, our mindfulness will become stronger and stronger. Seeing the form, our mind will extend for longer periods of time.

We can practice this type of meditation now, together. You can choose any object to look at. You can look at the back of the head of the person sitting in front of you, if you wish. You do not need to think, "Oh, what kind of hair-do do they have, how did they get their hair to go that way" or "This person doesn't have much hair at all." You don't need to think about that.

First, relax your mind. [Pause] Now look at a form. [Pause] Now, without particularly looking at a form, continue sitting with your mind relaxed. [All practice.]



When we take a form as an object of our meditation in this way there could be four things that happen that would make us uncomfortable. One is that the object we are looking at turns into two objects. Second is that our perception of the object becomes obscured so that we cannot see it clearly any more. Third is that everything starts moving so that the object does not remain still, kind of like getting dizzy. Fourth is that our eyes could start to hurt, as if the form is actually kind of penetrating into our eyes in an uncomfortable way. Nothing is wrong with any of these four happening; we can simply continue to look at whatever is appearing to our eyes. If we see two things that were once one we can keep looking, but at two.

When we practice this way, it is good to alternate the way we just did, sometimes looking at the forms, sometimes not particularly looking at the form but just sitting with our mind relaxed and going back and forth between the two. If we get tired of looking at form, just sit relaxed. If we get tired or bored from sitting relaxed then look at the form.

Are there any questions about this particular meditation technique with forms?

### **Meditation with Sound**

Now we can work with the technique related to sound. Do you hear any sound? What sounds? Is there a sound coming from the roof? We'll meditate together and pay attention to what we hear - it could be any sound, doesn't matter what. We do not need to focus on one sound. We simply look with the thought "what is my ear hearing?" We open up our ears. If we do not hear anything in particular, then that will become shamatha without object, and then when we place our attention with mindfulness on what we do hear, that is shamatha with object. When practicing this type of meditation with sound we can have both happening, in alternation with each other - shamatha with object and shamatha without object.

First sit with your mind relaxed. [Pause]

Now listen to sound. [Pause]

Now relax your mind. [Pause]

When we do these practices looking at forms and our mind looks at them too, listening to sounds and our mind listens to them too - when our mind is also looking at the form or listening to the sound - we are practicing mindfulness and developing our mindfulness. The more our mind is able to stay with those perceptual objects, the stronger and more developed our mindfulness is becoming. Through continuing to practice in this way, our mind becomes more tamed, more peaceful, and more happy and joyous. We come to gain control over our mind and we gain pliancy in our minds - our minds become more supple.

Question: I was listening to a clock ticking and the sound of the air moving in the vents. I was wondering why I cannot hear that as one sound. I view it as two different sounds. Even if my

mind really wants to hear everything as one sound, I'm always flitting between hearing different sounds, and it is never one.

Rinpoche: That is not a problem. You do not need to assimilate everything that your ears are hearing as one sound. You can simply place your attention on either whatever is more interesting to listen to or whatever seems most clear or most apparent. You're just sitting there with your ears open, asking yourself what your ears are hearing. Whatever sound becomes more apparent or whatever sound interests you more, you can listen to that sound with your mind.

Sometimes it will happen that even if there is sound, you won't be able to identify it as a particular sound. There is sound [Rinpoche fiddles with the microphone to make a sound] but you won't be able to identify it as a particular sound. That also is not a problem. This will be like shamatha without object, and when that happens it is good.

In particular, if you like to meditate on shamatha without object, these types of shamatha practices using sounds and forms, and so on, can actually improve your meditation. You will find that the moments in your practice of shamatha without objects are better than your usual attempts at shamatha without object. For the older students who have received pointing out instructions, their recognition of the nature of mind will become even clearer in these moments when they cannot identify sounds.

## Questions

Q: What is the difference between listening to a lecture or talk when you are focusing your ears and your mind together on that sound as opposed to when you are just focusing your ears when you are doing shamatha meditation?

R: The difference is mainly that of the presence or absence of recognition that you are meditating. If you listen to the dharma talk and take the teacher's voice as the support for your mindfulness, and you are aware that you're using that voice as the support for mindfulness, and you are relaxing and paying attention with your mind at that time, and you are aware that that is what you are doing, then that is meditation. But if you are not doing that, if you are not intentionally taking that as a support for your mindfulness and are just listening to the words, then that is no different than listening to somebody talk in an ordinary sense. There is the difference of whether there is mindfulness or whether there is no mindfulness.

Usually when we listen to sound, we lose ourselves. But when we practice this type of meditation on sound we do not lose ourselves.

Q: Do you offer meditation on the sense of taste?

R: Yes. Tomorrow I will teach tasting, touching with thought.

Q: Assuming that if I am going to start meditating I do it everyday, how long should I be doing it as a beginner?

A: You can look at and work with your schedule and see how much time you have in a general sense, but if you can start off by sitting for an hour that is good. And if you can sit for two hours, then that's really good. Also, when you are beginning meditation, it is important to rely on mindfulness from time to time in your ordinary life as well. For example, if you are drinking water you can remove the lid from the cup that you're drinking from and place your attention on that. Then place your attention on setting the lid down. Lifting up your hand again, place attention on your hand, and then when picking up the cup place you can place your attention on picking up the cup. Then place your attention on the taste, and know that you are putting the cup down. Placing your attention and knowing what you are doing are the same thing.

Q: Thank you.

R: You are welcome. Beginners need to be relaxed. But when you become more familiar, you can do things fast and still have the presence of mindfulness. You can have mindfulness in doing things like that. When we apply meditation to our ordinary life we do not have to be robots.

Q: Rinpoche, I once heard Ringu Tulku Rinpoche give the advice to a woman who was irritated by barking dogs to turn off her ears [Rinpoche laughs].

A: If you can turn your ears off with your mind then that is great. The best way to do that is for your mind to not think of the sound as an enemy but to think of it as a friend. If your mind can think of that sound as a friend, then it is the same thing as turning off your ears.

There is a story from a long time ago. A famous musician from India, a really good guitar player, was invited by many people to perform in different places. He once went on a tour of India that took six months. When he returned home he discovered that his wife had entered into a relationship with another man. When he discovered this he and his wife had a long conversation [laughter].

At the end of the conversation he determined that he was going to give up everything and go off to meditate. He gave all of his possessions to his wife, and went to the mountains taking only his guitar.

On the way to the mountains he saw a yogi meditating in a cave. His hair was tied up in a top-knot, and he was wearing big bone-ornament earrings. He was gazing straight off into space. The man saw this yogi and became very much instilled with faith. He approached the yogi and asked him for meditation instructions. The yogi had a little bit of a big belly.

The teacher taught the young musician how to meditate. He said, "Sit with your mind relaxed." He received this instruction from the teacher and went to a meditation place right beside where the yogi was meditating.

He tried to practice those instructions, sitting with his mind relaxed. But he could not do it at all - his mind was filled with thoughts. In particular, he could not stop thinking about his guitar.

Sometimes he would sit there and meditate and then think about his guitar. Finally he would give in and pick up his guitar and play it for a while. But he would say, "No, this is an obstacle to my meditation," and would cast it aside for a while and try to sit but then become distracted again.

The next day he went back to the yogi and said, "Precious guru I have such bad karma! I have no karma to meditate, I cannot do it. Please look upon me with mercy." The lama said, "What is your problem?" The musician said, "Because I have accumulated the bad karma of playing the guitar I cannot get it out of my mind. All I can think about is wanting to play guitar." Lama said, "That is no problem at all! I will give you a new method."

The lama taught him a method of meditation where he could focus on the sound of the guitar, and the man was really happy to receive that instruction. He returned to his meditation hut and meditated while playing his guitar. The point where he began his session was the point when he started playing his guitar. After about seven years he became a great mahasiddha.

He really did become a great siddha, and I hope that happens to you too. You can do it with your computers, or maybe with the telephone or car.

Q: What happened to his wife?

R: She got a good new husband and a good new house. Because he gave her everything he had.

[Dedication of merit.]

## ***Meditation and Non-meditation — Talk Two***

Good evening, everyone. Tonight we will continue discussing *shamatha* [Skt.], or calm-abiding meditation. Shamatha is the first type of meditation we engage in when we embark on the path of meditation. As we discussed yesterday, in Tibetan, shamatha is translated as *shi-ne*.

The first syllable, *shi*, means to pacify - meaning to pacify the mind over which we have no control or freedom - this wild mind that behaves like a crazy monkey, creating problems where there are no problems. This monkey-like mind that we have is ordinarily present with us throughout our day-to-day lives. It is good if we recognize this monkey-like, very wild mind. The worst situation to be in is not even knowing that the mind is behaving like a monkey. If we do not recognize this monkey-like mind, then the phenomenon of creating problems where there are no problems, and creating tasks where there are no tasks, becomes greater and greater.

How is it that this wild mind causes problems for us? It causes problems through fixation and being too tight. We could use the example of looking at our face in a mirror. There is nothing wrong with our face to begin with but, because of our tight fixation, we end up making problems with our face, looking for and creating faults. That type of fixation causes greater and greater suffering.

There are three levels to this fixation: coarse, subtle and very subtle fixation. In meditation we begin to work with the coarse level of fixation first.

The syllable *ne* in *shi-ne* means "to abide" or "to rest" - to gain freedom or self-control over our mind.

The method we use to gain such freedom is to rest our mind in its own nature by way of mindfulness. If we are able to practice a mindfulness that is harmonious with the nature of our mind, then we will eventually gain control over our mind.

### **Shamatha without Object**

In terms of resting the mind naturally, I spoke last night about "shamatha without object" or "shamatha without attributes." During this type of shamatha, we relax our body and we relax our mind in its natural state, just as if we were relaxing after having done two hours of exercise, or having done a very hard job. We tire ourselves out, and then we relax completely. That is how we rest in this first type of shamatha.

Shamatha without object is so easy that we don't trust it, and so for beginners we need something that is a little bit difficult - the practice of shamatha with object. Whether we're practicing shamatha with object or shamatha without object, we should simply have the attitude that we are going to try our best. We don't have to hold our mind tightly thinking, "It is absolutely not okay if I do not have a good meditation session."

## Relaxation

We should think: "If my meditation is good, let it be good. If my meditation is bad, let it be bad. If it is mistaken, let it be mistaken. If it is correct, let it be correct. If I am to be reborn in hell, let me go to hell. If I'm to be reborn in a Pure Land, let me go to a Pure Land." The time of meditation is precisely this state of being free from cares. We shouldn't be *that* carefree in our post-meditation stage, but when we meditate, we should definitely be as carefree as that.

Once when I was traveling from Delhi to the West, I met up with a Western person in the Delhi airport. The Westerner asked "Do you meditate?" And I said, "Yes, I do."

I returned the question, "Do you meditate too?" and he said, "Meditation is too hard for me. As soon as I meditate, about ten minutes pass, I start to feel dizzy, and like I'm about to vomit" [laughter]. Then I said, "If it is like that for you, then it must be a sign that you are not relaxing enough. So you need to relax more." He said, "Forget about that! The more I relax, the worse I get. The more I relax, the more dizzy I get."

I asked him, "Do you have a meditation teacher?" He said, "No, I'm reading everything from books."

I said, "Well, sit down here and meditate, and I'll watch you." The Westerner said, "Very good, I will."

So he sat down on a chair and started meditating.

[Rinpoche mimicked the person meditating - people laughed for a long time.]

He was just like that, with his body shaking and his eyes really tense and his lips pursed.

I said, "Okay, that was okay. Now I'll meditate, and you watch me." He said, "Good idea," and I sat down. The Westerner looked me up and down, head to feet, and then back up to the top of my head again. After a few minutes the Westerner said, "You're just sitting there!"

I replied to him, "Meditation is pretty much just sitting. It is just resting with your mind in whatever its nature is."

Then some announcements were made over the P.A. system in the airport, and that meant both us had to leave for our respective gates. The first leg of my flight from Delhi landed in Frankfurt. I got off the plane and went into the Frankfurt airport, and saw the same Westerner getting out of his plane. He approached me and said, "I was just sitting on my plane ride just like you were doing in Delhi, and I didn't get dizzy. So I think you have the right method. I think I got something from it."

Meditation is just sitting, just relaxing with our mind, with whatever nature it has. Our mind has a nature that we cannot label saying it is this or it is that. But at the same time, its nature is relaxed.

### **Meditation with Taste and Smell**

In terms of shamatha *with* object, we discussed last night about meditating using forms and sounds as objects of meditation. We will continue with that explanation, starting off with smells, using whatever smells that are occurring as a support for our meditation - pleasant smells and unpleasant smells. Perfume, incense - whatever it is. It is the same as forms and sounds. We can look at whatever forms are in front of us, and when we are using sounds, we listen to whatever sound is resounding at the time.

Smells are something that are perceived by our nose, and when we do shamatha with smells, we simply guide our mind to perceive the smells as well - we look at the smells with our mind, but that is all. We do not need to visualize smells, or try to meditate on the smell in any special way. We simply bring our attention to the smell, with our mind being aware of the smell.

It is the same with taste. We can take any taste as our object of our meditation - sweet, sour, bitter, spicy - whatever it is. When we eat food, our tongue faculty perceives the taste. In order to practice meditation, we merely bring our attention to it and have our mind merely notice the taste. That is all.

If you go into a retreat sometime, you should prepare very nice food for your meals. If your dharma friends ask you why you are putting so much effort into your food on retreat, that you should be spending most of your time practicing, you can just tell them, "That *i's* my meditation. I just eat tasty food."

If your friends then ask, "How is it going to help you to just eat food all day long in retreat," you can simply say, "That is my practice"

[laughter].

Just joking!

### **Meditation with Sensations**

The fifth meditation is tangible objects or tactile sensations. From among all the five senses, the tactile sensations are the best to use with meditation.

Tactile sensations include headaches, backaches, leg pains, knee pains - everything like that. Being hot, cold, hungry, overstuffed, thirsty; having a toothache, being dizzy, feeling heavy - all of these are tactile sensations.

When we have a strong toothache, our mind helplessly becomes focused constantly on it. We do not have any control over it. If we try to eat a tasty meal, our mind does not pay much attention to that; it is on our toothache. If we try to go out for a walk or try to play some sports, to refresh ourselves, or go out to watch a movie, that doesn't help too much because all we can think about is our toothache.

What is the main helper for this toothache all along? It is our own mind, thinking, "This toothache is terrible, this toothache is hurting me. When will I be free from this toothache?" Here we have hope and fear both: fear of the toothache harming us and hope for the toothache going away. These continuous thoughts in our mind make the toothache stronger and then the pain gets greater and greater.

But if we bring this toothache to our shamatha meditation practice, we can place our attention on the pain. Where is this pain happening? The pain is a feeling experienced in our mind. We do not look at the tooth itself; we look at the pain that we are experiencing in our brain.

If we look directly at the pain in this way, we will genuinely experience nondistractedness.

Usually our mind is naturally distracted by the pain. So if we intentionally direct our attention toward the pain, there already will be a strong support for nondistractedness. When we place our attention on the pain one-pointedly in this way, the pain does not go away but it will be a different pain than before. There will be a vivid sense of pain and, at the same time, a vivid sense of well-being and of joy. Thoughts like, "This pain is bad. I need to be free from this pain, I wish this pain would go away" will dissolve. So this is a very good opportunity to both improve our practice of mindfulness, and to help ourselves because we are not increasing our own pain.

We will do this practice together using tactile sensations - sore legs, sore backs or sore bums from sitting on the cushions. If you do not have any particular tactile sensation, you could create one.

Squeeze your hand in between your thumb and your index finger. Chinese doctors say that this helps headaches and stomach aches, so you should squeeze hard enough so that it hurts. The pain that you are creating is a feeling and so it exists in the mind. Look at that feeling one-pointedly. Do not be distracted from that feeling, that sensation. We will meditate like this together now.

First, sit in meditation posture, with your mind relaxed, and do shamatha without object for a little while. Then create a tactile sensation and look at it. Sit with your mind relaxed.

[All meditate together.]

### **Meditation with Thoughts**



If you understand this meditation-without-object technique, you will attain Buddhahood very quickly. Maybe in two or three days [laughter]. It is a very profound meditation but there is nothing special about it.

Our biggest obstacle in meditation is the movement of thoughts - thoughts of desire, aggression, ignorance, jealousy and so on. There are all kinds of movement in our minds - we usually think of these thoughts as getting in the way of our meditation and harming or destroying our meditation.

But if we understand the key points of meditation, then those very thoughts actually will be support for our meditation and will not harm our meditation at all. It is the same as how forms become support for our meditation.

Thoughts are any type of thought: negative thoughts of mental afflictions - desire, jealousy, anger and things like that; positive thoughts about helping others or thoughts of love; neutral thoughts, like "I want to eat" or "I want to stay here" or "I want to go for a trip around Halifax" or something like that.

Any of these thoughts can become a support for our meditation simply by looking at our thoughts. It is just like looking at forms and listening to sounds.

When we meditated on tactile sensations and brought sound into our meditation, they became supports for our nondistractedness. They helped us to maintain undistracted mindfulness. In the very same way when we look at our thoughts, they help us to be undistracted in our meditation.

There are two different basic states that our minds could be in: stillness and movement. There is no third category for beginners on the path of meditation; there is no state of mind they could experience that is not stillness or movement.

The technique of using thoughts as the support for our meditation relates with the state of mind when it is moving.

So it is important to know that we do not have to look at one thought alone, we simply look at whatever thoughts are arising. For example, thoughts are like this rosary or mala - one thought comes after the other after the other after the other after the other. Our mind usually operates like that, but when we do not look at thoughts, we are not aware of the process. We should look at them now.

Mindfulness is like my right hand, and the thoughts are like the mala. The mala is being pulled, bead-by-bead, by the right hand. In the same way, we look with our mindfulness at all of our thoughts. So our thoughts will not remain occupied with one thought because our minds are like wild monkeys. We will be filled with thoughts. We'll be thinking, "I need to eat something, I

need to drink something, I need to go here and do this, and I need to stay here and do that," and that is absolutely fine. We can just observe all of it.

As we look at our thoughts in this way, even a hundred thousand thoughts, that means you have a hundred thousand supports for meditation. That is very good. The thoughts themselves become a support for holding our mind.

[Brief meditation.]

## Questions

Question: Rinpoche, is it necessary to label your thoughts, or is awareness simply looking at a movement or hearing a sound?

Rinpoche: The most important point about it is recognizing that we are having a thought. But it is fine to use a label as a technique for doing that, because our mind does not work without labels. The entire work of this mind, the sixth consciousness, the mental consciousness that we are working with, is to join words and meanings, join words and the things to which they refer and cling to them as being the same thing. So to use the label would be fine, because that is how this mind operates.

When we work with shamatha with object, there is a subject and an object, a viewer and viewed, a sense of duality, so the labeling process is fine. The looker/viewer is mindfulness, and the object being looked at is our thoughts. There is a quote from a Buddhist text that says, "Through relying on focus, the state of nonfocus excellently arises," and that is what is being pointed to here.

Q: I noticed yesterday with the practice we did looking at a small object, that the mind would see the object, and then it would sort of fade out, like bad reception on a TV set, and come back in. Today, when doing the sort of physical negative-pain practice, the same quality would happen: even though you wouldn't like the pain, the mind would fade out and come back in the same way. Then when doing the thought-watching practice, the contrast wasn't as sharp. So that when there was sight, versus sort of foggy sight, going back and forth, and pain ...

Translator: Did the thoughts get replaced by sense perceptions?

Q: Yes.

Rinpoche: It is fine if the thoughts get replaced by a sense perception. When we are working with this mental consciousness, our main object is whatever appears to the mental consciousness. Usually in a special sense, what appears to mental consciousness is thoughts, but of course our mental consciousness can also focus on any of the five sense perceptions. If we are not having thoughts, but what is appearing more clearly is a form or a sound, then that is fine - we can focus on that.

Q: Does the practice mean that you just indulge in thoughts with the mindfulness? For me, it was more that you produce more and more thoughts and just stay with the train of the thoughts, and actually the more they come up, the better that is?

Rinpoche: The technique that we are practicing now is not about producing thoughts or creating thoughts, but rather looking at thoughts if they arise, recognizing that thoughts have arisen. This recognition is mindfulness. It is looking at what is happening in the mind, what the mind is thinking. "Oh, it's thinking about my house now. Oh, it's thinking about the city now," and so on.

Q: So, is it that when there are not so many thoughts you are more into the sense perceptions, or what you said before?

Rinpoche [laughs]:

We'll discuss a little later what you do when there are no thoughts,

Q: Thank you.

Q: When I was trying to relax my mind during meditation, that's when I would be thinking a lot of thoughts. And when I was trying just to think thoughts, I didn't really have any thoughts [laughter].

Rinpoche [laughs]: Okay. We'll talk about that later too [laughter].

Q: Earlier when you were talking about meditation, the first translation came that it is a way to "control the mind," and then it changed to "hold the mind." The transmission that most of us received from Trungpa Rinpoche was that controlling the mind was the problem, and he very much encouraged us to allow space for things to arise and dissolve. So I just want to clarify what you mean - could you comment on controlling the mind or holding the mind?

Rinpoche: With respect to the choice of words there, "control" has more of a sense of fabrication than "hold" does, a sense of contrivance to it. So that is why "hold" is a little bit better.

As to the general meditation technique that Trungpa Rinpoche presented, that was more connected to shamatha without object. The main instruction was to allow thoughts to arise and allow thoughts to depart. Whereas the particular technique that we have been discussing is slightly different: It is to look at the thoughts and use the thoughts that arise as the support for mindfulness. In this context, it is best if thoughts arise; it is slightly preferable if thoughts arise. If more thoughts arise, then that is number one for this particular technique.

We'll practice together again. This time, if you do not have any thoughts, make them. Make many thoughts quickly, clearly. There are three qualities to this technique: quickly, many and

clearly. But there's one important point: You have to look at every single one. Don't let one thought go by without being looked at. The looking is important.

[All practice.]

Q: Rinpoche, although that seemed a little fabricated, there was a sense of moving the mind quickly, like scanning a television screen. Actually, the eyes move too.

Rinpoche: The fabricated or the contrived part that you referred to is fine, because we are working with shamatha with object, and when you do this meditation technique, there is always going to be some fabrication. As was said before, through relying on a focus, the state of nonfocus excellently arises.

We'll talk about your second point, scanning the TV screen, a little bit later.

Q: Rinpoche, as someone who has been trying to get rid of thoughts for thirty years, it was interesting to dredge them up from where they had been hiding. It was almost like shining a spotlight on them one at a time - spotlight, then rest in the next one, spotlight on that one. It was almost like a cartoon cat that sticks his finger in a plug and gets all fuzzy. These thoughts didn't really go anywhere, they sort of got nailed, or paralyzed, somehow.

Rinpoche: That's very good.

Q: In the beginning and at the end when we were relaxed, there was this space that if a thought occurred, I would relax and let go, but I would notice it. And then when it was important to look at the thoughts and a thought would arise, when I looked, the thought would not be there. It's hard - the mind is either looking or thinking.

Rinpoche: Okay. That's good.

### **Meditation without Thoughts**

When you are looking at thoughts, like this, and in particular for beginners, there are two types of things that can happen.

Most people try to look at thoughts and don't see anything happening. There is a gap that happens, but it only lasts for about three or four seconds. Then another thought arises and we look at it. As soon as we start looking at it, we don't see it anymore. It goes back and forth in this way. A thought arises, we look at it, and we don't see it anymore; a thought arises, we look at it, and then we can't identify it. This is very good. It is just like sitting here. If you are someone who has already received pointing-out instructions on the essence of mind, this type of practice is particularly beneficial.

The meditation during which we cannot see any thoughts becomes shamatha without object. The meditation during which we can look at thoughts becomes shamatha with object. Both of these are very good. This is what happens to most people. For other people it is like looking at a TV screen.

The example used to illustrate this is of an elderly person watching two children who are very involved in what they're playing. They might be crashing two trucks together, or they might be building a house, or they might be playing video games, and they're very involved and very excited. But the old person is able to sit back and just laugh, no matter what is happening. Therefore, we can look at the thoughts. When we look at thoughts this way they're rendered powerless. It is like taking a snapshot of our thoughts or zapping our thoughts in this way.

When we are doing this, it does not matter how many thoughts are arising. If we can look at them, all of our thoughts become a support for meditation.

When the hand is touching beads of a mala, it is going through the beads one after the other in unbroken succession. We can do so in a way in which we are mindful of each bead as it passes. In the same way, when we are mindful of thoughts, it is impossible for us to be mindful of just one thought and keep our attention on that for any period of time, because the nature of thoughts is they come one after the other, and one thought does not stay around. It's an easy meditation, isn't it?

It is okay if we have thoughts; it is okay if we do not have thoughts; and there is no state of mind we can experience that is beyond these two - having thoughts or not having thoughts - so how much easier can you get?

With our last meditation session, the instruction was to create thoughts. But when we practice in the ordinary sense, there is no particular need to create thoughts.

In meditation, one main point is to simply pay attention with mindfulness. We do not need to identify what we are paying attention to. It is the paying attention itself that is most important.

When we continue practicing in this way, we begin with a sense of duality, with a viewer and viewed, or a looker and object looked at. As we become more and more familiar with the practice, the viewer and the viewed will become the same thing. When that happens, we are very close to seeing the essence of our mind.

During the shamatha audience this morning, one student asked if it were possible for shamatha to turn into vipashyana, or insight, without applying any particular effort. In most cases, the answer is no. You would have to apply some other view, such as the view of emptiness. But there is one situation where shamatha could change into vipashana without bringing in any other technique. This is that very instance.

### **Meditation with Negative Thoughts**

As we said earlier, there are three main types of thoughts we could have: negative, positive or neutral. For beginners on the path there is a special method for working with negative thoughts.

When we have negative emotions, such as strong anger or aggression in our mind, the first thing is to recognize that "anger has arisen in my mind."

At this stage we don't try to stop the anger, we simply recognize it. So don't hit the other person right away. Look at the anger not at your enemy.

For beginners, we chiefly look at the perceiving subject, instead of the perceived object. That is the key point, that is the key difference.

In this moment of anger, there is a mind thinking, "I want to hit that person." There is a mind that feels uncomfortable and painful and angry, all at the same time. So we look at that - we look at that mind of anger and we place our mindfulness on it as one-pointedly as we can.

This helps us to relate with our anger in the same way that placing our attention on a toothache helps us to relate with the toothache. It helps us to stop creating more pain for ourselves, and the unbearable aspect of the anger becomes pacified. There is still going to be a sense of anger or a sense of wrath, but the unbearability and the uncomfortableness of it will be slowly pacified as we use this as our object of meditation. As well, the anger itself will become a support for our nondistraction. We can apply this technique for other negative mental states too, such as depression, fear or any other type of suffering.

### **Meditation with Neutral and Positive Thoughts**

If we are working with neutral thoughts or positive thoughts, we can look at both subject and object. For example, if you are thinking, "I am going to go to downtown Halifax," you can look at the object aspect of those thoughts. You can look at what buildings appear in your mind, the streets, the lights, people coming and going - all of that.

If you looked at all those images as they are arising in your mind, it is the same thing as visualizing a deity in the creation stage. It is the same thing as visualizing yourself as a deity inside a palace and another deity in the sky in front of you. It is also the same thing as taking refuge, and visualizing all the objects of refuge in the sky in front.

What is the difference between thinking about going to downtown Halifax and visualizing deities? The main difference is that there is an aspect of pure appearance in the visualization of deities, and there is none of that in just thinking about going to downtown Halifax. But from the perspective of nondistraction and practicing mindfulness, accomplishing shamatha or calm abiding, there is no difference between the two. However, there is a separate benefit from working with pure appearance rather than with just thinking about Halifax.

If you ask yourself, "What is the difference between my usual thinking about going to downtown Halifax, and thinking about it with mindfulness," you're not aware of what you are thinking. You are not aware of how you arrived in your thoughts at downtown Halifax. There will not be any awareness of your thoughts of getting in the car and driving down the road, and then finally arriving in downtown Halifax. But if you have mindfulness, you will be aware and have a recognition of each stage. You will know when you entered the car and how it is that you are traveling.

If we keep meditating in that way, finally we will arrive at a state where the object we are looking at and the looker become one, and all of our mental afflictions - desire, aggression, jealousy, and so on - will be self-liberated. The power of our disturbing emotions or mental afflictions (*kleshas*) will be gradually diminished.

This has been an explanation of the sixth method of shamatha. The main point of shamatha is to gain freedom over our mind, to tap into the natural energy of our mind and tame the mind's wild monkey. When we do that, we will become like a well-tamed elephant.

They don't go about following their every whim or harming people randomly. They walk with a purpose.

What do we do with this shamatha mind that is like a well-tamed elephant? We put it to work on the path of liberation. In order to join fully with the path of liberation, we need to join with the practice of vipashyana or special-seeing, insight. Vipashyana is of two types: the vipashyana of emptiness and the vipashyana of the essence of mind. If emptiness and the essence of mind are joined with shamatha we attain the state of Buddhahood. That's all. Are there any questions?

## Questions

Question: First, I would like to thank the Shambhala Centre for affording me the opportunity to experience all four of your talks, and to be able to experience your profound wisdom. "Thought thought thought thought" - I have about a million of them, and I'm finding them in questions, so be patient with me. I'll try to be very brief. I've experienced so much wisdom and knowledge from you in these last few days that I'm wondering, as a beginner, what would you like me to leave with if you could tell me one thing?

Secondly, [to the translator] and I think you're a wonderful interpreter, I know that with different languages sometimes it is difficult to translate thoughts and phrases, and I'm wondering if Rinpoche is feeling confident that you gave expressed [laughter] everything. I don't blame you if you don't ask him! Like, is he confident that you have expressed properly everything that people wanted to be expressed?

And thirdly, he seems like such a calming person, I'm wondering if he ever experiences "monkey-mind."

Rinpoche: So, as to your first question, in relation to the talks on loving-kindness and compassion, the one point to keep in mind is to benefit others with a sense of balance. In relation to the meditation talks, mainly stay with shamatha without object.

Q: Okay.

Rinpoche [in English]: Good translator! I've been many places. Some translators make things worse. Tyler is very direct and very clear. Very good [applause].

Okay. Monkey-mind? Yes, I do have monkey mind.

Q: Thank God! Thank you.

Q: I was curious if Rinpoche believes that certain negative emotions might hide themselves? And if so, how does one encourage negative emotions, specifically anger, to come to your conscious mind?

Rinpoche: The main thing is to try to get into the habit of recognizing anger. Once you are able to do this, then slowly you will be able to see it more and more clearly. For example, you might experience anger and then only later be able to recognize that you were feeling anger. You can take whatever moment it is that you remember that and say, "Oh I was feeling anger back then" and just appreciate that moment of recognition. Try to get into that habit slowly in that way. There is anger that arose before that you weren't aware of, and there is the moment of recognition later on. When you have that moment of recognition, you can ask yourself, "How did I feel back then when anger was arising, and how do I feel now that I have recognized it?" You can take that as an example - kind of inform yourself with that and then move forward into this habit of recognition.

Q: If there is no arising is there no anger?

Rinpoche: If anger does not arise that does not mean that there is no anger. Everyone has the root of anger present in them in a dormant form. So there is obvious anger then there is dormant anger. That seems to be what you're asking about. But the dormant anger does not disappear until you attain what is called the first bodhisattva bhumi. Until you first directly realize emptiness, everyone has dormant anger, and you don't need to worry about that.

Q: But it could take a while [laughter].

Rinpoche: A little while.

Q: Firstly, I would like to say thank you. Secondly, last night you answered a question about the amount of time a beginner should meditate or sit, and you said an hour. As the mother of a young family, I think that was rather discouraging for me, that amount of time. Thirdly, I have been practicing my spirituality as a Christian for the better part of my life, and I have come to a



part of life where I feel that needs to change, but at the same time I do not feel that I am finished with Christianity. So I feel confused.

Rinpoche: With the example of one or two hours of meditation, that is not necessarily how long you should have to meditate. That recommendation was for those who are very serious about really training in this meditation technique and have time. You could try to do it for that long. But it is not saying that if you could do it for an hour you will get the benefit, and if you don't do it for an hour you do not get the benefit. You could start by doing fifteen minutes of meditation, even one minute of meditation or even five. If you do one minute of meditation then there is the benefit of one minute of meditation. If you do an hour, then there's the benefit of doing an hour. So you could begin by meditating for fifteen minutes - there is a very good benefit to doing that.

With regard to the second question about spiritual traditions, you absolutely do not have to give up your old tradition at all to practice these meditation techniques. It is completely fine to maintain your practice of Christianity and still meditate by using these Buddhist practices. Furthermore, you can bring some of your Christian images into the practice of shamatha with object, as we have been talking about. Instead of using a Buddhist figure as an object of your focus you could, for example, use a cross as the object of meditation and do shamatha with that. Sometimes in Buddhist meditation we visualize Buddhas in the sky in front and do shamatha with those objects. You could visualize Jesus and use that as a support for shamatha. It is a question of personal preference - I prefer Buddhist view and meditation techniques and Buddhist teachings as a spiritual path, but that does not necessarily mean that this is what everyone wants. It is up to each individual.

Q: I feel that it is time to move on spiritually and learn about other things. That is where the confusion lies. I've learned about Christianity, not that I'm any expert, but as well I feel it's time to learn about another spiritual ...

Rinpoche: What to do will depend on your own feelings. Examine them and examine what your desires are in that regard. People may have a lot of questions about their old religious tradition. They might start thinking that some things are untenable or do not make sense to them. Then they might encounter something new and have a sense of coming home. They might think, "This is really making sense to me. I feel like I am coming home with this." If that happens then it is fine to go with that new tradition. You can examine for yourself how you feel.

Q: Rinpoche, I was a bit distracted by a negative thought when you gave the instruction on the technique for working with negative thoughts. So I wonder if you could go over that again, and perhaps expand a little bit on the part about working with the subject rather than the object.

Rinpoche: What's your practice level in the Buddhist curriculum?

Q: Sadhaka.

Rinpoche: You can refer to the teachings on the *Three Words that Strike the Vital Point*. Listen to the tapes and read the text. The basic point here is that even negative thoughts can become the support for mindfulness. When you look at them they become the support for mindfulness and the support for nondistractedness, just like concentrating on a form or listening to a sound. To further clarify this, you can listen to the tape of tonight's talk.

Q: Thank you.

Q: Hi. I am actually in a Buddhism class at Dalhousie University [in Halifax], and I have an exam tomorrow [laughter]. There has been considerable debate in my class over the nature of impermanence. There are certain students in my class who seem to feel that Buddhist doctrine in its own essence contradicts itself because they are saying that everything is impermanent. But then our professor also taught about the state of nirvana, and enlightenment being a permanent thing. That's where they are feeling the confusion and the contradiction: If everything is impermanent, how can the state of enlightenment be permanent? I'm just wondering what you think, and if you yourself believe that the state of nirvana to be permanent.

Rinpoche: This seeming contradiction of enlightenment or nirvana being permanent on the one hand, and all apparent reality being impermanent on the other, actually is *not* a contradiction. Seeing them as a contradiction is a case of mixing the way things *appear* with the way things *are*. In other words, the way things *appear* is the *relative* truth, and the way things *are* is the *ultimate* truth.

When we refer to the true nature of reality, that is a synonym for Buddhahood. Buddhahood is the true nature of everything - the true nature of all sentient beings, the true nature of Buddhas - and the true nature of sentient beings is enlightenment. It *is* nirvana, ultimate reality. It is said to be permanent because it is free from arising - it never came into being and it never will go out of being. Something that is devoid of arising can never be said to be impermanent, because to be impermanent, something has to go through the stages of arising, abiding and ceasing - arising in the beginning, abiding in the middle, and ceasing in the end. The ultimate nature, the true nature of things, never arose so it can not be permanent. But as long as something arose, then it is necessarily impermanent. That refers to all phenomena of relative truth, or apparent reality, the way things appear. From the perspective of the way things appear, everything arises, abides and ceases. As soon as something comes into being, it is marked by the quality of impermanence. It has to abide and then it has to cease. But on the other side, ultimate reality, there is no such impermanence because there is no arising. You can't call it permanent either because if there is no impermanence, there cannot be permanence.

Nevertheless, it is sometimes called the permanence that is beyond impermanence and permanence.

Q: If Buddhahood can never arise, how does one become enlightened, or how does one transcend from the relative?

Rinpoche: We go back to the distinction between the way things *appear* and the way things *are*. Buddhahood, or the state of enlightenment, is actually the way things *are*, the way we are ultimately. But from the perspective of the way things *appear*, we appear as confused sentient beings. The way we appear is not really the way we are. So when we attain Buddhahood, when we recognize the way we really are, the way things *appear* and the way things *are* become the same thing.

Q: Thank you.

## Conclusion

Rinpoche: We'll conclude at this point.

I have received some requests to say a few words about Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok. Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok was a great lama, a great teacher and a great practitioner. He was mainly a Nyingma practitioner, but he also practiced Kagyü lineage practices. He also was a tertön, a treasure discoverer. In particular, he was a great siddha, a mahasiddha. Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok would fill an entire valley in Tibet with people and give teachings to gatherings of upwards of fifteen thousand people - ten thousand monastic monks and nuns, and five or six thousand lay people. The people would create a little city by building earth houses to stay in along the sides of hills on both sides of the valley, and then gather together under a huge tent to hear Jigme Phuntsok's teachings. He would teach all day long.

From the perspective of the students it was never a very elaborate situation. Basically they studied the dharma and meditated together. They did not have much to eat or fancy clothes to wear or anything like that. Nevertheless, Jigme Khenpo Phuntsok produced a lot of master scholars (*khenpos*) from these gatherings. He also produced a lot of master practitioners from amongst the monks and nuns. On that very ground there were two monastic colleges (*shedras*) - one Kagyü and one Nyingma. Sometimes Jigme Phuntsok would give teachings to his students, and at the same time he would take them to a place where he would discover treasure teachings (*terma*), which he would reveal in front of everyone.

There are two khenpos at Sherab Ling monastery, my primary residence in India, both of whom came from this place in Tibet where they studied with Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok. Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok passed away two or three weeks ago. Everything is impermanent. Right?

I have been very delighted to be able to come to Halifax for a few days to talk about the dharma with you, and am very happy that you have listened with such enthusiasm and interest. In particular, I'm very pleased with the way the vajrayana students listened to the teachings, and have a good feeling that you have understood the material. The shamatha talks and audiences also were very good. So thank you to everyone, especially to all who were involved in the preparation and coordination of the program. Everything was done excellently. When I was going down the stairs, there always was someone there ready to support me. There was

someone ready to open the door and help me with my seat. It was just like being a king. I've never been treated that way before. Also thank you to everyone who works at this center.

I greatly appreciate the stages that have been laid forth by Trungpa Rinpoche - how to practice and study on the path. They are very good stages, and it makes me very happy that you are all practicing them.

Richard John [Director of Halifax Shambhala Center]: Rinpoche, you know by now how we all feel about you. We have benefited tremendously from your wisdom and clarity. It is extraordinary how you have been able to inspire all of us from beginners to dinosaurs, so we are tremendously grateful and very moved to be able to study with you. I would like to offer a token of our appreciation to you. There is an extra little package for you - a copy of *Shambhala: Sacred Path of the Warrior* [by Chögyam Trungpa], which is one of our very favorite books. Tyler, Rinpoche wants you to read this book to him.

Rinpoche: Thank you.

RJ: Lama Chhewang, it has been delightful to have you with us here. Tyler, thank you again. Superb translator. You're getting more creative too. Are you really from Truro [a small town near Halifax]? [Laughter and applause].

Rinpoche [in English]: Thank you very much, Translator!

RJ: Many many people have made the obvious request for Rinpoche to come back to Halifax often. I presented this request to him formally before the talk tonight, and I am very pleased, with your permission Rinpoche, to tell everyone that you will be back next year and the year after that.

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